



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 22, 2005

Ms. Sharon Alexander
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
Dewitt C. Greer State Highway Building
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2005-02431

Dear Ms. Alexander:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 220296

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for any information regarding the formula that was used to evaluate three Trans-Texas Corridor submittals. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.104, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision" and encompasses information made confidential by other statutes. You state that the submitted information is confidential under section 361.3023 of the Transportation Code. Section 361.3023 provides:

- (a) To encourage private entities to submit proposals under Section 361.3022, the following information is confidential, is not subject to disclosure, inspection, or copying under Chapter 552, Government Code, and is not subject to disclosure, discovery, subpoena, or other means of legal compulsion for its release until a final contract for a proposed project is entered into:

(1) all or part of a proposal that is submitted by a private entity for a comprehensive development agreement, except information provided under Section 361.3022(b)(1) and (2);

(2) supplemental information or material submitted by a private entity in connection with a proposal for a comprehensive development agreement; and

(3) information created or collected by the department or its agent during consideration of a proposal for a comprehensive development agreement.

(b) After the department completes its final ranking of proposals under Section 361.3022(h), the final rankings of each proposal under each of the published criteria are not confidential.

Transp. Code § 361.3023. Section 361.302 of the Transportation Code defines a “comprehensive development agreement” as “an agreement that, at a minimum, provides for the design and construction of a turnpike project and may also provide for the financing, acquisition, maintenance, or operation of a turnpike project.” Transp. Code § 361.302. In this instance, you state that the information at issue was created and collected by the department during consideration of a proposal for a comprehensive development agreement. Further, you inform us that a contract has not yet been awarded for this project. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we determine that the submitted information is confidential under section 361.3023 of the Transportation Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code. Because this ruling is dispositive, we need not address your other arguments.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the

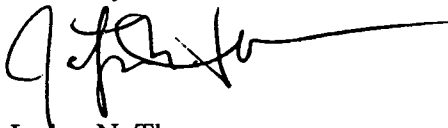
statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Jacklyn N. Thompson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JNT/jev

Ref: ID# 220296

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Tony Hartzel
Transportation Writer
Dallas Morning News
P. O. Box 940567
Plano, Texas 75094-0567
(w/o enclosures)